



NICOLET



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NICOLET, March 29th, 1892.

Looking down the long vista of the past, Nicolet is one of the places most deeply imprinted on my memory. Mrs. Cressé, an old playmate of my father's (Charles Gethings), lived here, and when about ten years of age I here frequently passed holiday time. She was a Miss Van Courtland, daughter of a military friend of my grandfather's, Captain James Gethings of the original 100th Regiment. I married early, and never returned to Nicolet for forty-five years, though often desirous of so doing. Why did I not? for the simple reason that I did not know how to get here except by some roundabout way via Three Rivers. And that I write this document is due to the fact that I am desirous of bringing before your notice, *not only this beautiful little town, but the way to reach it*, for most eminently is it fitted for a delightful summer resort, and also as a suitable site for enterprise and paying industries.

I had not seen it for forty-five years, when

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last summer old memories so strongly drew me here that I had to come. I expected only to see the old college and an old acquaintance, the daughter-in-law of my dear friend, Mrs. Cressé, whose husband in my early days was seigneur here, and whose son married Mademoiselle de Lozeau (now Mad. Pacaud), still living, and looking younger than I do, although twenty years older,—so much for Nicolet air. It was pouring when I arrived last year on a few hours visit, but the sad downfall could not hide the wonderful beauty of this place. Situated on the banks of the river like Kamouraska, it excels it much in that it possesses most beautiful old trees that fringe its roadside, and also that it is garnished with some really stately edifices—a grand college, convents, Normal School and several really very handsome private residences. Here is also a bank, a branch of the Ville Marie of Montreal, lumber establishments owned by Messrs. Ball, McCaffrey, Tourville and O'Shaughnessy, and in the village a fine residence constructed and occupied by Louis Caron, the architect of all these fine constructions. Near the college are the elegant houses of Mr. LeCompte, Dr. DeSaulniers, Mr. Ball, and

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in course of erection a fine house by Dr. McCaffrey; Mr. Papillon, a fine photographer. A comfortable though very unpretentious little hotel, Rochette, close to the college, gives you all necessary comfort. And now how to get to this little elysium. If from Quebec, just step on the Grand Trunk Railroad cars at Levis as far as St. Hyacinthe, and you will then find cars ready to bring you here, stopping for a few minutes at Drummondville, where Mr. Mitchell, one of the enterprising owners and managers of the Drummond County Railway, resides, which, only about four years in existence, will prove a great boon to the residents of these rural towns. Leaving Montreal, you take the train at Grand Trunk station and come as far as St. Hyacinthe, where you find the cars to bring you here; one train (the afternoon one) connects directly; taking the morning one, you can spend a day in St. Hyacinthe, also a nice place I will speak of later. The Vermont Hotel close to the station at St. Hyacinthe is far better than it looks; a very nice English girl sees to your comforts, and I had good meals, a thoroughly comfortable bedroom and private parlor at very moderate rates. And now to return to Nicolet; last year the curé

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of the parish, who had kindly bought one of my books, sent one to a Mrs. Thornton, an old lady ninety-five years of age, who, on reading the article on the Quebec Bank, and noticing my father, Mr. Gethings', name, recognised it as that of her husband's old friend and her son's godfather, gone before her for so many years. She sent me a message that she would like to see me, and I have hastened to obey her summons, for a few words soon revealed to me the mine of historical fact stored in her memory. I hear that till within two years she was noted for her wonderful epistolary talent, and was the constant correspondent of all members of the family. I found her just as smart as most persons of seventy; she stoops and is hard of hearing, but in all other respects her faculties are perfect. She welcomed me warmly. "Do you know, even my eldest daughter here remembers your father before he was married, and we were near neighbors for years." "Who was your father, dear lady?" I asked. "A German by descent," she answered. "They called him Brown in Canada. His name was Brun; he was a German, an armourer, and came out to this country after visiting in Russia and other

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places in Europe to perfect his knowledge of arms." "And your mother!" With face lit up with enthusiasm the lady exclaims: "Her name was Colombe. You understand, a descendant of Christopher Columbus, and her meeting with my father was at the Island of Orleans where her father lived. You know the Island of Orleans near Quebec. Well, on the Duke of Kent's trip to this country—he was coming out to become Governor General,—he noticed on this island a stone house with flagstaff; making inquiries about it, he was told that it belonged to Mr. Colombe. This gentleman was visited by the Duke of Kent, and invited to call when in Quebec, and he went there and paid his respects to H. R. Highness."

Mr. Brun occupied about the year — a house in St. John street, Quebec, nearly opposite to that where lived Mr. Pozer, in those days one of the richest men in Quebec. Mr. Pozer's house is there still, and now owned and tenanted by Mr. Alford, his relative, to whom he bequeathed it; next to it is another old residence now occupied by Mr. Tourangeau of the Post office, Quebec; this house was the former home of a well known merchant, a trader in church ornaments and necessities, and very well off.



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The old gentleman I myself remember perfectly ; he was unmarried, and very polite to all the ladies, and as his mother was very old, many ladies of my acquaintance were most assiduous in their attentions to him, and not a few expected handsome legacies

He left them the legacies right enough, but he died without signing the will, and dire was the disappointment felt when it was known, and lamentations were loud and deep, that when his lawyer urged him to do so, he said : " I'll take a sleep first," turned around and slept the sleep from which there is no waking. My own belief is that at the last he did not sign the will, because though he would not make a will in favour of his brother's family with whom he had quarrelled, yet on his death-bed he felt it right that they should inherit his property.

To return to Mrs. Thornton and her remarkable history, she tells me that on one occasion an officer entered her father's place of business, and showing a firearm asked him if he thought he could get it repaired in Canada. " I think so," answered Mr. Brun ; " in fact, I'll engage to repair it myself." " But are you sure you can do it ?" queried the military man. " This pistol belongs to

the Duke of Kent, and he values it particularly, as it was a gift to him from the Duke of Edinburgh, his godfather." "I think I can satisfy you as to my being able to do it," answered Mr. Brun; "if you look here you will see my name, this I made myself in the Old Country." These facts coming to the ears of the Duke of Kent caused him to make acquaintance with Mr. Brun, and resulted in the Duke's influence procuring the appointment for him of the position of armourer I think to the forces.

Among the old pictures shown me by Mrs. Thornton are four plates showing the commencing of and continuation of the storm that destroyed His Majesty's ship "Ramellies." This memorable hurricane terminated in a thunder storm; the lightning struck the already disabled and water-logged vessel, and in the fourth plate we see it burning. If not mistaken, the Marquis of Lorne's father was at one time connected with this vessel. Many small old colored prints, some curious fruit plates, etc., and a quilt made of silk more than a hundred years old. I have just seen it, the colours as bright as if lately made. I must observe *en passant* that Mrs. Thornton's grandfather, Mr. Colombe, lived

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to the age of 102 years, and then did not die of old age but of charbon, after an illness of only two hours. The first house she lived in in Nicolet is still the solid stone house occupied by a librarian near the Ville Marie Bank, and second house from the river.

Mrs. T. still resides with her three daughters in the comfortable cottage they have owned and lived in for 36 years. The old lady points with pride to various old prints and engravings, some 150 years old, which would rejoice the heart of an amateur of antiquities. And then, to my surprise, shows me a photograph. "Do you know whose portrait that is?" asks Mrs. T. "Why," I answer, "that is the son of my own first cousin, Lieut. C. F., whose mother was my father's sister." "Yes; and, wonderful to relate," continues the old lady, "I knew that baby's great grandmother before her marriage, though I have never seen her since, and I got that portrait because her grandson is married to a connection of mine."

And now of Nicolet proper. Its seminary originally was but a simple school in 1801, founded by the will of Mr. Brassard, curé of Nicolet, and transformed into a classical college by Mgr. Dinant, bishop of Quebec. But its

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real founder and originator was Monseigneur I. O. Plessis, who in 1806 bought from the latter this growing college which had passed unexpectedly into strangers' hands.

It was considerably enlarged in 1813 by this distinguished prelate, whose generosity was unbounded towards this house of education which he desired to establish on a large basis. With this object he solicited and obtained letters patent of incorporation from his Britannic Majesty on the 10th of Dec., 1821. The actual buildings now extant were commenced in 1827 at the expense, in great part, of Bishops Panet and Signay, who succeeded each other in the see of Quebec.

The new seminary opened in 1831. Its principal building is 309 feet long and 38 wide, two wings 180 feet by 43, and two upper flats. It is situated on the banks of the Nicolet river, two miles from the borders of Lake St. Peter, and is surrounded by large gardens and grounds agreeable and salubrious.

It has always been directed by the secular clergy, presided over by the Bishop of Quebec, then by the Bishop of Three Rivers, and now by the present Bishop of Nicolet.

The Grey Nuns have here a fine new Hospital

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called the Hotel Dieu ; at the former one died the Rev. Mr. Paradis, who had collected quite a large sum in Europe and presented it to this establishment. This gentleman is, I think, the same one who accompanied my husband to the Vatican, and enabled him to obtain a private audience with His Holiness, the late Pope-Pius the Ninth.

#### *Commercial Academy.*

Facing the river is the fine commercial academy of Saint Jean Baptiste, founded by Mgr. Gravel, and directed by the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine.

Also facing the river is the splendid Convent of the Order of Sisters of the Assumption, for the education of young girls, founded in St. Gregoire in 1853, transferred to Nicolet in 1872, and this new convent built in 1886. The old church of Nicolet is still in existence. It is too small for the population, but the walls are so thick that it is almost impossible to destroy them, and it will, I presume, later be repaired for further use.

I also here met Mr. H. A. Chillas, whom I found to be a descendant of one of our old respected citizens of Quebec, viz., the late John Chillas.

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Mr. Chillas has been a resident of Nicolet for the last 58 years—his attention having been drawn to Nicolet by the British American Land Company, who were then building extensive wharves at Port St. Francis, with the intention of making that place the outlet for their Eastern Township lands, and to locate a town at the port; but on account of its unfavorable position, being low land, and subject to inundation in the spring of the year, and the company reserving all the most advantageous lots for building on, the project of the company eventually fell through. Port St. Francis is situated about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles on the north or St. Lawrence side of the town of Nicolet. Amongst the first projected railroads in the province of Quebec was a line from Sherbrooke (through the company's lands) to Port St. Francis, but which was nipped in the bud by the action of the G.T.R.

Mr. Chillas was for many years an active member for the advancement and progress of Nicolet. He was appointed commissioner of small courts in 1836, which commission he still holds, and probably the oldest commission in the province of Quebec, being now over 56 years standing. He was for many years mayor for the

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parish of Nicolet and County Council, and was elected a councillor for the town of Nicolet after its incorporation as a town, and for which incorporation, the people of Nicolet are much indebted to him for his exertions in superintending the passage of the Act of Incorporation through the House of Assembly at Quebec in 1872; also for obtaining an Act for the erection of booms on the river Nicolet, much to the advantage of our mill owners and lumber men of the town of Nicolet and adjoining parishes.

Nicolet before its incorporation was a small village of about eight hundred inhabitants, but which, since its incorporation, has increased to nearly three thousand inhabitants, and instead of a few straggling dilapidated houses has now some magnificent convents, college and Friars' school with many other fine buildings, including post and telegraph offices, and an aqueduct which furnishes the town with an ample supply of excellent water.

Nicolet is also the see for the Diocese of Nicolet, with Bishop's palace and cathedral.

Mr. Chillas was appointed postmaster in 1840, and after having conducted the same for about 25 years, had it transferred to his daughter

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Miss M. Chillas, who is still postmistress of Nicolet, making a period of over 52 years which Mr. Chillas' family have had charge of the post office. Miss Chillas has also charge of the telegraph office here.

The Drummond County Railroad has a station in the town of Nicolet, and its terminus at the mouth of the River Nicolet, from which place they can ship their goods during the season of navigation.

The Government have lately dredged the River Nicolet and built an extensive pier out to deep water line, which is of great advantage to the mill owners, lumbermen and to the public in general, and of vast importance to the Drummond County Railroad. With the present advantages of transport by land and water, and the central position of Nicolet, it is very likely that in the short distance it will become a manufacturing locality.

#### *Post Office.*

The present popular Inspector of Post Offices residing in Three Rivers is also a son of Mr. Chillas.

I must not forget to state that Mrs. Thornton has residing with her her three daughters, all in



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perfect health ; the eldest is over 70 years of age. Like their mother, they are delightful company, being good conversationalists, and always willing cheerfully to impart humourous or historical reminiscences from their well-stored memories.

Since my visit I have learned with much regret of the death of Mad. Proulx, also at an advanced age. She was the mother of that much respected prelate, Rev. Mr. Proulx, director of the college of Nicolet. She was also one of the gracious ladies of the old régime, as delightful in manner as eminent in piety.

I extract from the journal of my dear late husband the following account of his reception by His Holiness :

EXTRACT FROM JOURNAL OF THE LATE DR. M.  
OF ROME, 25TH FEBRUARY, 1846.

This morning at the extravagantly early hour of six, Petry (brother of Rev. Mr. Petry of Quebec) and myself got up and dressed full dress, as we were promised to be presented to His Holiness Pope Pius the Ninth. We were to call for Mr. Paradis at 7, and the audience was expected to be granted at 9 o'clock. So punctually at 9 we found ourselves at his lodgings, and shortly after we started for the Palace at

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Monte Cavallo, where Monseigneur the Bishop of Montreal was to meet and present us. After passing through several apartments, and waiting in an ante-room for three hours, we were ushered in by the Lord Chamberlain into a room furnished in regal style, and shortly after His Holiness the Pope, attired in a robe of white, entered. So suddenly did he appear that the first intimation I had of his presence was the prostration of the Bishop's secretary on his knees, and immediately afterwards the whole of the party followed, including myself, of course.

We each in turn advanced and were presented by the Bishop. His Holiness received us with much courtesy and great suavity of manner. His countenance is very pleasing. He appears about 55 years of age. He spoke to us in French and Spanish for a short time, and the interview was over. I have spent the day chez nous in a literary way, and Messrs. Paradis, Serletti and Appleton have just gone home after spending the day with us.

*Bishop Bourget.*

The Bishop who presented Mr. Petry and Mr. Macpherson to His Holiness was Monseigneur Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, who suc-

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ceeded Monseigneur Lartigue, the first Bishop of the diocese, in 1840, and gave in his resignation in 1876. He died Archbishop of Marianopolis. Monseigneur Bourget commenced the construction of the Cathedral, now actually building, and modeled on that of St. Peter's at Rome.

Monseigneur also accomplished other great works during his episcopate, and founded several conventual institutions for ladies, amongst which are the Sisters of Providence, those of the Sacred Heart, of Jesus and Mary, of St. Ann and that of the Sisters of Mercy. He died in the odor of sanctity in 1885.

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